

1861

1911

TITLES and LEADERS of the

THE BATTLE OF FREDERICKSBURG.

THE Story of One of the Greatest and Bloodiest Battles of the War, Resulting in One of the Worst of Union Defeats and the Displacement of Burnside by Hooker at the Head of the Army of the Potomac—Told by the Commander of the Confederate Left, Against Which the Famous "Stonewall" Charges of the Federals Were Directed—Called by History One of the Most Dramatic, Gallant, and Yet Foolhardy Series of Storming Undertakings of the Entire War.

By James Longstreet, Lieutenant General, C. S. A.

On the early fall of 1862, a distance of not more than thirty miles, lay between the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia. A state of uncertainty, and it had existed for several weeks preceding the battle of Sharpsburg or Antietam, fought September 16-17, and resulting in Lee's retreat from Maryland to Virginia, but the movements that resulted in the battle of Fredericksburg began to take shape when on the 5th of November the order was issued removing Gen. McClellan from command of the Federal forces.

The order assigning Gen. Burnside to command was received at Gen. Lee's headquarters, then at Culpeper Court House, Va., about twenty-four hours after it reached Warrenton, Va., though not through official courtesy. Gen. Lee, on receiving the news, said he regretted to part with McClellan, "for," he added, "we always understood each other so well. I fear they may continue to make these changes till they find some one whom I don't understand." The Federal army was encamped around Warrenton (about thirty-five miles northwest of Fredericksburg), and was soon divided into three grand divisions, whose commanders were Gen. Sumner, Hooker and Franklin.

Lee's army was on the opposite (or Richmond) side of the Rappahannock river, divided into two corps, the first commanded by myself, and the second by Gen. T. J. (Stonewall) Jackson. At that time the Confederate army extended from Culpeper Court House, where the 1st Corps was stationed, on its right across the Blue Ridge down the valley of Virginia to Richmond, about forty miles northwest of Warrenton. There Jackson was encamped with the 2d Corps.

About the 18th or 19th of November we received information through our scouts that Sumner, with his grand division of more than thirty thousand men, was moving toward Fredericksburg. Evidently he intended to cross the river and the Rappahannock before we could offer resistance. On receipt of the information one of my divisions was ordered to move to the river.

We made a forced march and arrived on the hills around Fredericksburg about 3 o'clock on the afternoon of the 18th. Sumner had already arrived, and his army was encamped on Stafford Heights, overlooking the town from the Federal side.

Before I reached Fredericksburg Gen. Patrick, provost marshal general, crossed the river under a flag of truce and put the people in a state of great excitement by delivering the following letter:

"Headquarters of the
"Army of the Potomac,
"November 21, 1862.
"To the Mayor and Common Council of
"Fredericksburg:

"Gentlemen: Under cover of the houses of your city, shots have been fired upon the troops of my command. Your mills and manufactories are furnishing provisions and the material for clothing for armies in rebellion against the government of the United States. Your railroads and other means of transportation are removing supplies to the depots of such troops. This conduct is a flagrant violation of the laws and policy of the United States, and by direction of Gen. Burnside I accordingly demand the surrender of your city into my hands, and a representative of the government of the United States, at or before 5 o'clock this afternoon. Failing in an affirmative reply to this demand by the hour indicated, sixteen hours will be permitted to elapse for the removal from the city of women and children, the sick and wounded, and aged, etc., which period having expired I shall proceed to shell the town, and to obtain possession of the city, every necessary means will be taken to preserve order and secure the protective action of the laws and policy of the United States government. I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant.

"Brevet Major General, U. S. Army,
"Commanding Right Grand Division."

While the people were in a state of excitement over the receipt of this demand for the surrender of their town, my troops appeared upon the heights opposite those occupied by the Federals. The alarmed non-combatants heard of my arrival and immediately sent to the demand of the Federal general, and the town authorities that I did not care to occupy the place for military purposes, and that they were notified that the threatened shelling would not take place, since the Confederates did not purpose to make the town a base of military operations.

Before my troops reached the little city, and before the people of Fredericksburg knew that any part of the Confederate army was near, there was great excitement over the demand for surrender. No people were in the place except aged and infirm men, women and children. That they should become alarmed when the surrender of the town was demanded by the Federals was quite natural, and a number proceeded with great haste to board a train then ready to leave. As the train drew out, Sumner's batteries on Stafford Heights opened fire on it, adding to the general terror, but fortunately doing no serious damage.

The spectacle was nothing, however, to what we witnessed a short time after.

About the 26th or 27th it became evident that Fredericksburg would be the scene of a battle, and we advised the people who were still in the town to prepare to leave, as they would soon be in danger if they remained. The evacuation of the place by the distressed women and helpless men was a painful sight. Many were almost destitute and had nowhere to go, yielding to the cruel necessities of war, they collected their portable effects and turned their backs on the town. Many were forced to seek shelter in the woods and brave the icy November nights to escape the approaching assault from the Federal army.

Very soon after I reached Fredericksburg the remainder of my corps arrived from Culpeper Court House and as soon as it was known that all the Army of the Potomac was in motion for the prospect of battle Jackson was drawn down from the Blue Ridge. In a very short time the Army of Northern Virginia was face to face with the Army of the Potomac.

At a point just above the town a range of hills begins, extending from the river edge out a short distance and bearing around the valley somewhat in the form of a crescent. On the opposite side are the noted Stafford Heights, then occupied by the Federals. At the foot of these hills flows the Rappahannock river. On the Confederate side nestled Fredericksburg, and around it stretched the fertile bottoms from which fine crops had been gathered and upon which the Federal troops were to mass and give battle to the Confederates.

On the Confederate side nearest the river was Taylor's hill, and south of it the now famous Marye's hill (the scene of the awful charge on the stone wall). Next was Telegraph hill, the highest of the elevations on the Confederate side, known as Lee's hill, because during the battle Gen. Lee was there most of the time, where I had my headquarters in the field. Next was a declivity through which Deep Run creek passed on its way to the Rappahannock river, and then the gentle elevation of Hamlet's crossing, not dissimilar with a name, upon which Stonewall Jackson massed 20,000 men. It was upon these hills that the Confederates made their preparations to receive Burnside whenever he might choose to cross the Rappahannock. The Confederates were stationed as follows:

On Taylor's hill, next the river and forming my left, R. H. Anderson's division; on Marye's hill, Ransom's and McLaws' divisions; on Telegraph hill, Pickett's division; to the right and about with his division, the latter stretching across Deep Run bottom.

On the hill occupied by Jackson's corps were the divisions of A. P. Hill, Eury and Taliaferro, that of D. H. Hill being in reserve on the extreme right. To the Washington Artillery, on Marye's hill, was assigned the service of advising the army at the earliest possible moment of the Federal advance. Gen. Barksdale, with his Mississippi brigade, was on picket duty in front of Fredericksburg the night of the advance.

The hills occupied by the Confederate forces, although overgrown by the heights of Stafford, were so distant as to be outside the range of effective fire by the Federal guns, and with the lower sloping grounds between them, formed a defensive series that may be likened to natural bastions. Taylor's hill, on our left, was unassailable. Marye's hill was more advanced toward the town, was of a gradual ascent and of less height than the others, and we considered it the point most assailable and guarded it accordingly. The events that followed proved the correctness of our opinion on that point. Lee's hill, near our center, with its rugged sides, retired from Marye's and rising higher than its companions, was comparatively safe.

This was the situation of the 45,000 Confederates massed around Fredericksburg, and they had twenty odd days in which to prepare for the approaching battle.

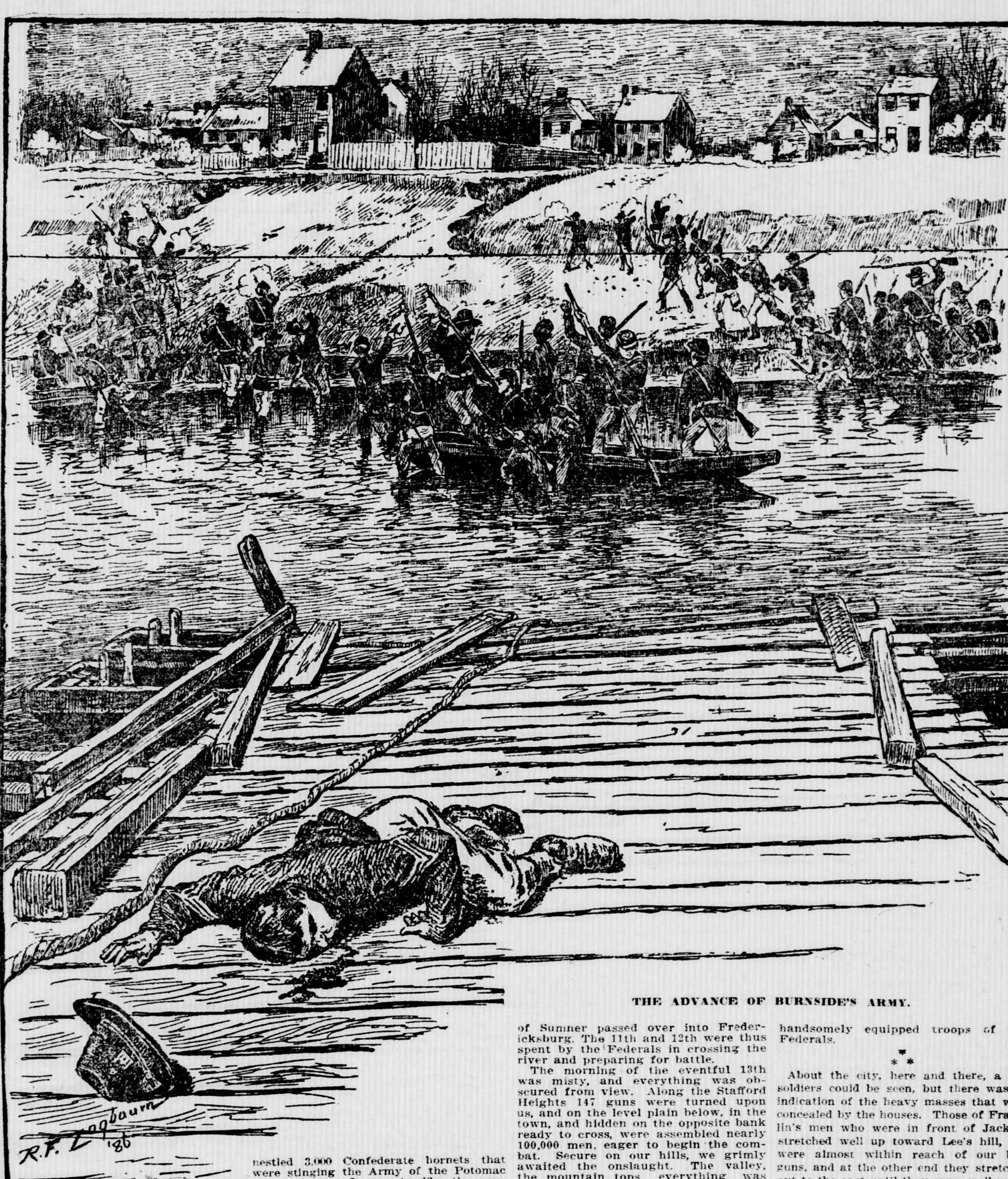
The Federals, on Stafford Heights, carefully matured their plans of advance and attack. Gen. Hunt, chief of artillery, skillfully posted 147 guns to cover the bottoms upon which the infantry was to form for the attack and at the same time to guard upon the Confederate batteries as circumstances would allow. Franklin and Hooker had joined Sumner, and 80,000 strong, watching the plain where the bloody conflict was soon to be, in the meantime the Federals had been along the banks of the river looking for the most available points for crossing. The soldiers of both armies were in good fighting condition, and there was every indication that we would have a desperate battle. We were confident that Burnside could not dislodge us, and patiently awaited the attack.

On the morning of the 11th of December, 1862, an hour or so before daylight, the slumbering Confederates were awakened by a solitary cannon thundering on the heights of Marye's hill. Again it boomed, and instantly the aroused Confederates recognized the signal of the Washington Artillery and knew that the Federal troops were preparing to cross the Rappahannock to give us the expected battle.

The Federals came down to the river's edge and began the construction of their bridges, when Barksdale opened fire with such effect that they were forced to retire. Again and again they made an effort to cross, but each time they were met and repulsed by the well directed bullets of the Mississippians. This contest lasted until 1 o'clock, when the Federals, with angry desperation, turned their whole available force of artillery on the little city, and sent down from the heights a perfect storm of shot and shell, crushing the houses with a cyclone of fiery metal.

Our position on the cyclone we saw the batteries hurling an avalanche upon the town whose only offense was the slumbering Confederates were awakened by a solitary cannon thundering on the heights of Marye's hill. Again it boomed, and instantly the aroused Confederates recognized the signal of the Washington Artillery and knew that the Federal troops were preparing to cross the Rappahannock to give us the expected battle.

Some of our troops following up this repulse got too far out and were in turn much disconcerted when left to the enemy's superior numbers and were obliged to retire in poor condition. A Federal brigade advancing under cover of Deep Run was discovered at this time and attacked by the 1st and 2nd regiments of Pender's and Laws' brigades, the former of A. P. Hill's and the latter of Jackson's divisions. The Federals were forced to retire. This series of demonstrations and attacks on the Federals, and the disconcerting of the Federals' movements between the Confederate right and the Federal left.



THE ADVANCE OF BURNSIDE'S ARMY.

of Sumner passed over into Fredericksburg. The 11th and 12th were thus spent by the Federals in crossing the river and preparing for battle. The morning of the eventful 13th was misty, and everything was obscured from view. Along the Stafford Heights 147 guns were turned upon us, and on the level plain below, in the town, and hidden on the opposite bank ready to cross, were assembled nearly 100,000 men, eager to begin the combat. Secure on our hills, we grimly awaited the onslaught. The valley, enveloped in the thickest fog, and the movements of the Federals, suddenly, at 10 o'clock, as if the elements were taking a hand in the drama about to be enacted, the warmth of the sun brushed the mist away and revealed the mighty panorama in the valley below.

Franklin's 40,000 men, reinforced by two divisions of Hooker's grand division, were in front of Jackson's 20,000. The flags of the Federals fluttered gayly, the polished arms shone brightly in the sun, and the Federal troops, in the form of the buoyant troops gave to the scene the air of a holiday occasion. The Federals were ordered to draw, which he did, fighting as he retired before the Federals, who had by that time succeeded in landing a number of their troops. The Federals then constructed their pontoons without molestation, and during the night and the following day the grand division

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I have described, in the opening of this article, the situation of the Confederate left. In front of Marye's hill is a plateau and immediately to the base of the hill there is a sunken road known as the Telegraph road. On the side of the road next to the town was a stone wall, shoulder-high, against which the earth was banked, forming an almost unapproachable defense. It was impossible for the troops occupying it to expose more than a small portion of their bodies. Behind this stone wall I had placed about 2,500 men, being all of Gen. T. R. R. Cobb's brigade, and a portion of the brigade of Gen. Kershaw, both of McLaws' division. It must now be understood that the Federals, to reach what appeared to be the most vulnerable point, would have to pass directly over this wall held by Cobb's Infantry.

An idea of how Marye's hill was protected may be obtained from the following incident: Gen. E. P. Alexander, my engineer and superintendent of artillery, had been shelling guns and in going over the field with him before the battle I noticed an idle cannon. I suggested that he place it so as to aid in covering the plan in front of Marye's hill. He answered:

"General, we cover that ground now so well that we will comb it as with a fine tooth comb. A chicken could not live on that field when we open on it. A little before noon I sent orders to all my batteries to open fire through the streets or at any points where the troops were seen about the city, as a diversion in favor of Jackson. This fire began at once to develop the work in hand for myself. The Federal troops swarmed out of the city like bees out of a hive, coming in double-quick march and filling the edge of the field in front of Cobb. This was just where we had expected attack, and I was prepared to meet it. As the troops massed before us, they were much annoyed by the fire of our batteries. The field was literally packed with Federal troops from the vast number of troops that had been massed in the town. From the moment of their appearance began the most fearful carnage.

With our artillery from the front right and left tearing through their ranks, the Federals pressed forward with almost incredible determination, maintaining their steady step and closing up their broken ranks. Thus resolutely they marched upon the stone wall, and behind which quietly waited the Confederate brigade of Gen. Cobb. As they came within reach of this brigade, a storm of lead was poured into their advancing ranks, and they were swept from the field like chaff before the wind.

During the night a Federal strayed before his lines and was taken up by some of my troops. On searching him we found a memorandum of Gen. Burnside's arrangements, and an order for the renewal of the battle the next day. This information was sent to Gen. Lee, and immediately orders were given for a line of rifle-pits on the top of Marye's hill, and for other guns to be placed on Taylor's hill.

Before the well directed fire of Cobb's brigade the Federals had fallen like the steady dripping of rain from the eaves of a house. Our musketry alone killed and wounded at least 5,000, and those with the slaughter by the artillery, left over 7,000 killed and wounded before the foot of Marye's hill. The dead were piled sometimes three deep, and when morning broke the spectacle that we saw upon the battlefield was one of the most distressing I ever witnessed. The charges had been desperate and bloody, but utterly hopeless. I thought, as I saw the dead, that they deserved success if our age and daring could entitle soldiers to victory.

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We were on our feet before daylight, and as I saw the Federal forces retained position during the 14th and 15th, we were not without hope. There was some little stirring, but it did not amount to anything. The information was sent to Gen. Lee, and immediately orders were given for a line of rifle-pits on the top of Marye's hill, and for other guns to be placed on Taylor's hill.

Gen. Lee, who was with me on Lee's hill, became uneasy when he saw the attacks so promptly renewed and pushed forward with such persistence, and feared the Federals might break through our line. After the third charge he said to me:

"General, they are mauling very heavily and will break your line, I am afraid."

"General," I replied, "if you put every man now on the other side of the Potomac on that field to approach me over the same line, and give me plenty of ammunition, I will beat them before they reach my line. Look to your right; you are in some danger there, but not on my line."

I think the fourth time the Federals charged a gallant fellow came within 100 feet of Cobb's position before he fell. Those who were left standing were either killed or they fled from certain death. This charge was the only effort the Confederates made to dislodge Cobb, and after it was repulsed I felt no apprehension, assuring myself that there were enough of the dead Federals on the field to go over half the battle. The anxiety shown by Gen. Lee, however, induced me to bring up two more brigades, to be on hand, and Gen. Kershaw, with the remainder of his brigade, was ordered down to the town. Kershaw dashed down the declivity and arrived just in time to see the Federals, at this juncture, fell from a wound in the thigh and died in a few minutes from loss of blood.

A fifth time the Federals formed and

about the city, and there, a few soldiers could be seen, but there was no indication of the heavy masses that were concealed by the houses. Those of Franklin's men who were in front of Jackson stretched well up toward Lee's hill, and were almost within reach of our best guns, and at the other end they stretched out to the east until they came well under the fire of Stuart's horse artillery under Maj. John Pelham, a brave and gallant officer, almost a boy in years.

As the mist rose the Confederates saw the movement against their right. Maj. Pelham opened fire upon Franklin's command and gave him lively work, which was kept up until Jackson ordered Pelham to retire. Franklin then advanced rapidly to the hill where Jackson's troops had been stationed, filling the woods with shot as he progressed. Shortly Jackson awaited the approach of the Federals until the counter attack drove the Federals into some confusion.

The enemy again massed and advanced, pressing through a gap between Archer and Lane. This broke Jackson's line and threatened very serious trouble. The Federals, who had wedged themselves in through that gap, came upon Gregg's brigade, and then the severe encounter ensued in which the Federals were mortally wounded. Archer and Lane very soon received reinforcements and, rallying, joined in the counter attack and covered their lost ground. The concentration of Taliaferro's and Early's divisions at this attack was too much for the Federals, and they were driven back to the railroad and beyond the reach of our guns on the left.

I was on an important case some years ago in this city where four nurses were employed. Our patient was dangerously ill, and we worked night and day, doing our best to help keep breath in the poor creature. Finally, after a week of weary passing, and my patient on the tenth day, we were four happy, tired women. It was a large house, with many servants, but the nurses were never served on time and were never hot. We never complained about it, as we knew and shared our patient's condition. During the first week of convalescence we were told that our patient was a very nice woman, and that we four nurses must use the servants' entrance. It was too much, with in an hour we were all in tears.

When the distinguished surgeon in charge of the case, who interfered in our behalf, asked our nurse what she objected to in our behavior, she replied: "Oh, the nurses are very worthy and painstaking, but, really, my front door is to be used only by my friends and equals."

charged and were repulsed. A sixth time they charged and were driven back, when night came to end the dreadful carnage, and the Federals withdrew, leaving the battlefield literally heaped with the bodies of their dead.

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Experiences of a Trained Nurse in Washington

WHEN the services of a trained nurse are needed there is considerable trouble to employ them, but because the advent of a nurse is usually looked upon as being a nuisance. As some housekeepers put it, "They just upset the house." They never look at it from the nurse's point of view.

For fully fifteen years I have followed my chosen profession—that of a trained nurse—and the question most frequently asked by my friends and relatives is: "Are nurses made comfortable at the houses to which they go?" No, I say, decidedly "No."

Graduate trained nurses are usually women of refinement and culture, but by many of the people they are employed they are looked upon as a "sort of over-servant," which naturally does not tend to harmony or good feeling. And the situation by their dislike to wait upon those they term "lady help." It would surprise you to know how people who know the manner in which nurses are treated by prominent men and women who should know better.

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With our artillery from the front right

MAP OF THE BATTLE OF FREDERICKSBURG, DECEMBER 13, 1862. The small solid black rectangles indicate the position of the Confederate army, while the outline rectangles give the position of the three grand divisions of the Army of the Potomac. Franklin's division facing the Confederate right, while Sumner's and Hooker's grand divisions were placed to give battle to Lee's left and center, with particular attention to Lee's left center, on the 13th, 14th, and 15th of December.